

STATEMENT OF THE CLAIMS

1. (currently amended) A vending machine for use with a remote service center which includes a humanly-operated control terminal which communicates with said vending machine to approve or deny vending certain transactions with a buyer, said vending machine comprising:

- a) a video capture device for capturing an image of the buyer;
- b) an identification document reader for capturing an image of an identification document of the buyer;
- c) a communication link coupled to said video capture device and said identification document reader which transmits said image of the buyer and said image of the identification document to the humanly-operated control terminal; and
- d) a user interface which gives the appearance to the buyer that said vending machine autonomously approves or denies the vending transactions; and
- e) age-restricted items in said vending machine.

2. (original) A vending machine according to claim 1, wherein:

 said user interface includes a video display.

3. (original) A vending machine according to claim 2, wherein:

 said user interface includes an animated character displayed on said video display.

4. (original) A vending machine according to claim 3, wherein:

 said animated character apparently autonomously interacts with the user.

5. (original) A vending machine according to claim 1, wherein:

 said user interface includes an audio reproducer.

6. (original) A vending machine according to claim 5, wherein:

 said user interface includes synthetic speech reproduced via said audio reproducer.

7. (original) A vending machine according to claim 1, wherein:

 some vending machine transactions are controlled by the humanly operated control terminal and some other vending machine transactions are completed without input from the humanly operated control terminal.

8. (canceled)

9. (currently amended) A vending machine according to claim 8 1, wherein:

 said vending machine is adapted to vend an age-restricted item only after without receiving input from a remotely located human over a communications link.

10. (currently amended) A vending machine for use with a remote service center which includes a humanly-operated control terminal which communicates with said vending machine to approve or deny vending certain transactions with a buyer, said vending machine according to claim 1, further comprising:

- a) a video capture device for capturing an image of the buyer;
- b) an identification document reader for capturing an image of an identification document of the buyer;
- c) a communication link coupled to said video capture device and said identification document reader which transmits said image of the buyer and said image of the identification document to the humanly-operated control terminal;
- d) a user interface which gives the appearance to the buyer that said vending machine autonomously approves or denies the vending transactions; and
- e) means for conducting a sobriety test.

11. (currently amended) A vending machine according to claim 1, further comprising:

- [e]f) a processing system adapted to at least one of,
 - i) provide an indication of the validity of the identification document, and
 - ii) provide an indication of the likelihood that the buyer is a person whose image is located on the identification document.

12. (currently amended) A system for vending goods which require verifying the age and identity of a buyer of the goods, said system comprising:

- a) a remotely-located service center which includes a humanly operated control terminal; and
- b) a vending machine, including
 - i) a video capture device for capturing an image of a buyer,
 - ii) an identification document reader for capturing an image of an identification document of the buyer,
 - iii) a communication link coupled to said video capture device and said identification document reader for transmitting said image of the buyer and said image of the identification document to said humanly operated control terminal, and
 - iv) a user interface which gives the appearance to the buyer that the vending machine is processing a vending transaction autonomously when in fact the transaction is being processed by the remote humanly operated control terminal.

13. (original) A system according to claim 12, wherein:

 said user interface includes a video display.

14. (original) A system according to claim 13, wherein:

 said user interface includes a computer generated character displayed on said video display.

15. (original) A system according to claim 12, wherein:

 said user interface includes an audio reproducer.

16. (original) A system according to claim 15, wherein:

 said user interface includes synthetic speech reproduced via said audio reproducer.

17. (original) A system according to claim 12, wherein:

 some vending machine transactions are controlled by the humanly operated control terminal and some other vending machine transactions are completed autonomously.

18. (original) A system according to claim 12, further comprising:

 a database in which information related to the identification document and an item vended is recorded.

19. (original) A system according to claim 12, further comprising:

 c) a processing system adapted to at least one of,
 i) provide an indication of the validity of the identification document, and
 ii) provide an indication of the likelihood that the buyer is a person whose image is located on the identification document.

20-25. (canceled)